



Unveiled

A VIDEO INSTALLATION BY
THOM VANDER BEKEN

In Western Europe, which has in fact become a receiver of immigrants although it did not see itself in that role, some people still find it difficult to apprehend their identity in terms of any other culture but their own.

**Amin Maalouf –
In the Name of Identity**

It seems that only our past truly belongs to us: the Flemish Primitives, Breugel, Rubens, Van Dyck, the bell-fries and beguinages, that is the 'real' Flanders.

**Erik Hertog –
Flemish Identity, Myth
and Reality**

THE FLEMISH PRIMITIVES ARE REDISCOVERED IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND THE NEWLY FOUNDED BELGIAN STATE (1830) QUICKLY CLAIMS THEIR FAME. VAN EYCK, VAN DER WEYDEN AND OTHERS SHOW THAT A SMALL COUNTRY IS CAPABLE OF GREAT ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENTS. THE PRIMITIVES – TRUE TO THE ROMANTIC TRADITION – BECOME PART OF A COMMON, BELGIAN, NATIONAL IDENTITY.

TODAY, THE WESTERN WORLD IS UNDERGOING PROFOUND CHANGES. THE INFLUX OF IMMIGRANTS COMPELS US TO QUESTION THE EXISTING CONCEPT OF IDENTITY. SHOULD WE STICK TO A STRICT DEFINITION OR BREAK IT OPEN? PERHAPS THESE FIVE HUNDRED YEAR OLD PAINTINGS ARE OF USE AGAIN IN THE RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD OF TODAY.

*Early Netherlandish painting refers to the work of artists, also known as the **Flemish Primitives**, active in the Low Countries during the 15th and 16th century. The major artists of this period include Rogier Van der Weyden, Jan Van Eyck, Hans Memling, Dirk Bouts and Hugo van der Goes. During this period, the modern national borders of France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands did not exist.*

A number of the artists traditionally associated with the movement had linguistic origins that were neither Flemish nor Dutch. Van der Weyden was born in Tournai, and Robert Campin in Valenciennes (present-day France), Hans Memling was born in Seligenstadt, near Frankfurt in Germany, and Dirk Bouts was a native of Haarlem (The Netherlands). Even the Van Eyck brothers were born on the edge, namely in Maaseik.



IT'S SPRING 2010.

In the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, I'm admiring *Portrait of a Young Woman* by Rogier Van der Weyden. It is a painting which intrigues in all its simplicity. The woman wears a white scarf gracefully draped around her head, and her hands rest peacefully on top of one other. Nothing else, and yet so strong. She looks you straight in the eye and her gaze will not let you go.

While I'm in Berlin, the veil debate is raging in full force in Belgium. The discussion is situated within a broader debate on identity that is high on the agenda everywhere else in Europe. It comes at a time when more and more voices would have us believe that multicultural society has failed. Two generations after migration started the melting pot is still not working. Together with the knowledge that the newcomers will stay, fear has slipped into our minds. Fear for the loss of our identity. But what does that identity stand for?

Thinking about the painting in Berlin, I ask myself the question: what would happen if I replaced the veiled women of Rogier Van der Weyden by (veiled) Muslim women of today? That was the beginning of *Unveiled*.

Ethnicity, religion and skin colour have become dividing factors. We tend to forget what we have in common: emotions. According to art historians Rogier Van der Weyden is the man who introduced human emotion into Western art. He shows real people with real feelings. His portraits of women are especially moving. The fact that most of Rogier's women wear a headscarf, (apparently) doesn't keep us from admiring these paintings.

For a year and a half, I have worked together with twelve (veiled) Muslim women. The paintings of Rogier Van der Weyden were the object of our attention. The Muslim women took the place of Rogier's women in an effort to bring two divided worlds together. The confrontation within the same image is intended to raise questions and encourage debate. What makes us who we really are?

That is what *Unveiled* is about.



THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

(1440–1445) KMSK Antwerp

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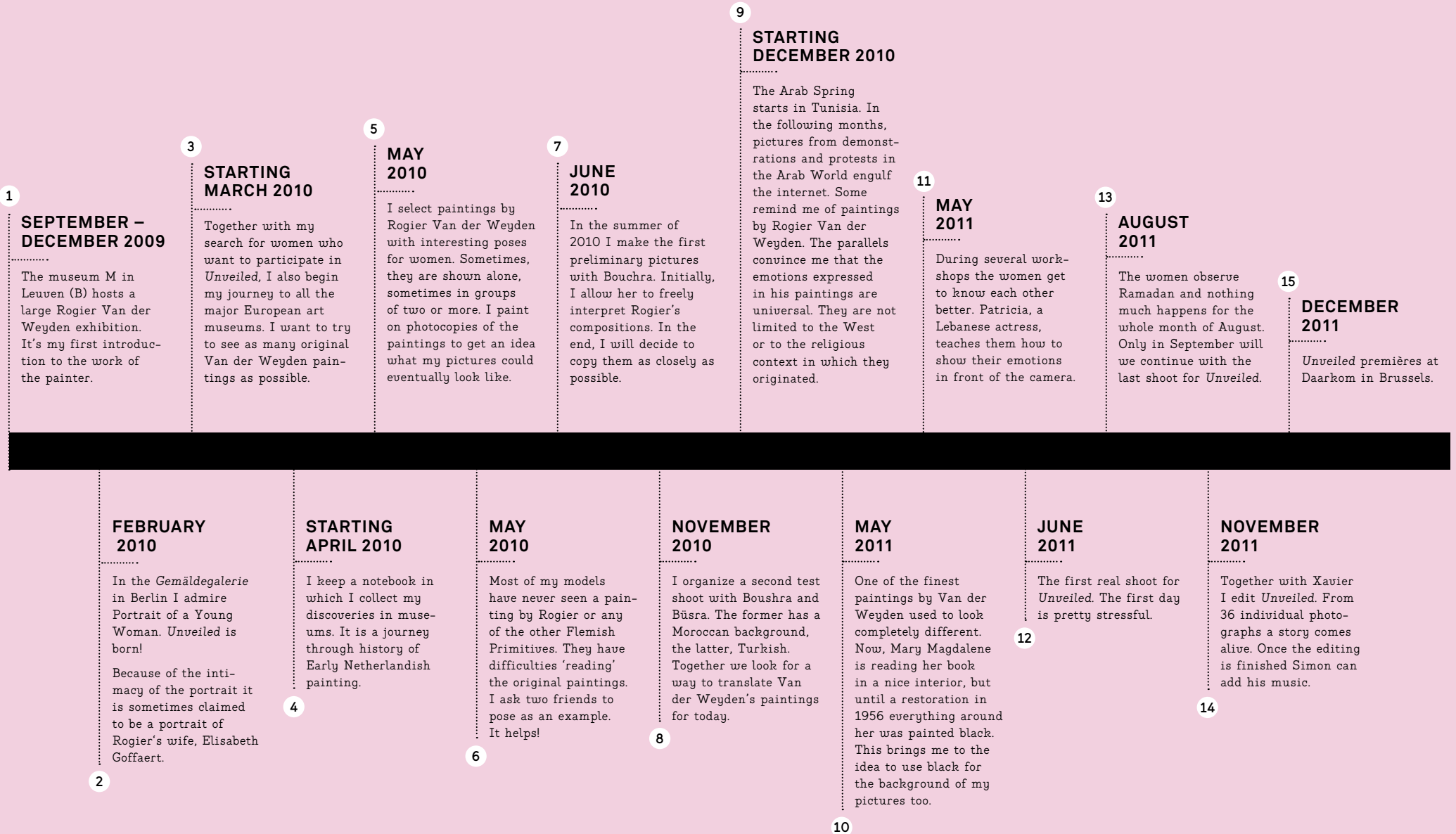


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VAN DER WEYDEN

Little is known about the life of Rogier Van der Weyden. Although his private life was generally uneventful, he was highly successful in his career and internationally famous. His surviving works consist mainly of religious triptychs, altarpieces and commissioned single and diptych portraits. His paintings were exported – or taken – to Italy and Spain, and by the latter half of the 15th century, he had eclipsed Jan Van Eyck in popularity. Rogier Van der Weyden died in 1464 and lies buried in the St. Catherine's Chapel of the Cathedral of Saint-Michael and Saint-Gudula in Brussels.

TIMELINE



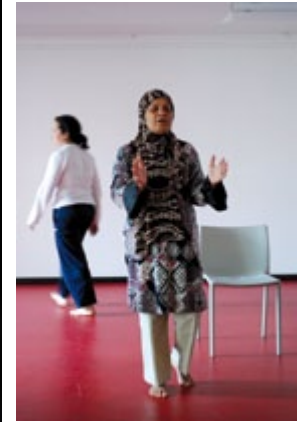
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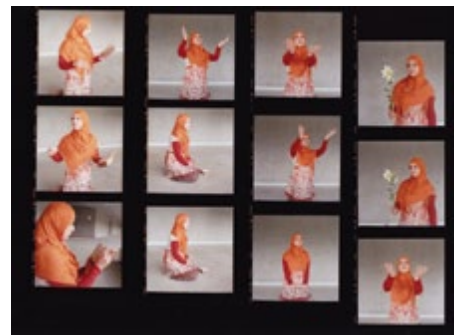
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A VIDEO LOOP INSTALLATION BY THOM VANDER BEKEN.

Unveiled consists of 36 pictures, each of them referring to a different painting by Rogier Van der Weyden.

CREW

Thom Vander Beken, Tom De Visscher (DOP), Xavier Pique (editing), Patricia Barakat (coaching), Stéphanie Carlier (make-up), Simon Halsberghe (music)

MODELS

Bouchra, Büsra, Fatima, Fatima, Fatima, Banu en Esra, Aïcha, Bilal, Malika, Nadia, Hélène, Loubna en Dalil

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Jan Grygoriew, Berlin | www.jangry.com

MERCI

Roos, Malaika, Sabine (Daarkom), Joachim (de Pianofabriek), Hilde and Annelies, Tine, Mikael, Graham, Fatma, Samira, Sahila, Saïda, Emilie, Zohra, Malika Saïssi and Lea David (de Vaartkapoen), Frederik Vandewiele, Wendy Schelfaut, Lorne Campbell, Evelyne Hingue (legal advice), De wereld van Kina (skulls), Nico van Hout, Vik Leyten, Madeleine Ter Kuile (KMSK Antwerp)

DEDICATED TO LILY MAHY



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